

“Smog Advisory Today”:

Are seniors at risk?

Protect yourself from the harmful effects of smog.

Smog is the direct result of human activity – air emissions from our homes, businesses and vehicles. Smog is a year-round issue that can affect everyone’s health, but seniors are especially vulnerable.

Why do health risks increase for seniors?

Seniors face greater health risks from smog because poor air quality can aggravate pre-existing heart and lung conditions. Those suffering from asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema, bronchitis, heart disease or hardening of the arteries should be especially cautious. The combination of smog and smoking is especially harmful to your health.

The respiratory system’s ability to fight infections is also decreased so the risk of a senior becoming ill from poor air quality is greater.

How can I tell if I am being affected by smog?

Be aware that some activities such as garden work or taking the dog for a long walk, which are considered light activity to some people, may be heavy exertion when smog levels are high. Know your limits and pay attention to how you are feeling.

Early warning signs that smog may be having an impact on you include:

- Mild breathing difficulties
- Chest tightness and coughing
- Headache
- Eye, nose and throat irritation
- Low energy or feeling unusually tired; a chore that usually seems easy could prove more strenuous
- Aggravation of respiratory diseases (such as asthma)

If you experience these symptoms, reduce your activity level and exposure.



What can I do to protect my health?

Listen and watch for smog alerts on the radio or TV especially during traditional smog season (from May to September).

If a smog advisory is issued in your community:

- Avoid or minimize time spent outdoors.
- Avoid or minimize strenuous physical activities outdoors. Do not exert yourself.
- Avoid or reduce exercising near areas of heavy traffic because motor vehicles are a primary source of air pollution.
- If you suffer from asthma or other respiratory or cardiac illness, it is essential that you speak with your physician about how to best manage your condition.
- If you experience any breathing difficulties or respiratory complications, contact your physician or go to the nearest hospital.

If you have a heart or lung condition, talk to your health care professional about additional ways to protect your health when smog levels are high.

Reduce Smog, Reduce the Risk

Whenever we burn fuel, we create the pollutants necessary to form smog. We burn oil and gas to power our cars and to heat and cool our homes. It is important to remember that much of Ontario's electricity is generated by burning fossil fuels, so reducing your energy consumption helps prevent smog.



Here are some actions you can take to reduce smog:

At home:

- Conserve electricity by adjusting the heat or air conditioner and turning off lights you are not using.
- Limit the amount of wood you burn in your fireplace or wood stove. When burning wood, use only the dry, seasoned variety.
- Avoid letting your car, or any other engine, idle for long periods.
- Restrict your use of gasoline-powered equipment.
- Avoid mowing the lawn when air quality is poor.
- Don't use oil-based products such as paints, solvents or cleaners if you can avoid them. They contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which contribute to smog.
- Get engine tune-ups and car maintenance checks as advised by the car manufacturer's maintenance schedule.



At work:

- If possible, take public transit or walk to work.
- If you use a car, don't travel alone; encourage and facilitate carpooling.
- Avoid traffic congestion.
- Consider teleconferencing, instead of travelling to meetings.

To receive free smog notifications by e-mail or to find the current air quality in your community go to www.airqualityontario.com or call 1-800-387-7768 (English); 1-800-221-8852 (French).

For more information on the impacts of smog on your health, visit: www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/pubhealth/smog.html